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151204Z Dec 04

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 03 TEGUCIGALPA 002795

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JUSTICE FOR OIA, AFMLS, AND NDDS
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DEA FOR OILS AND OFFICE OF DIVERSION CONTROL

E.O. 12958: N/A

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SUBJECT: HONDURAS 2005 INTERNATIONAL NARCOTICS CONTROL
STRATEGY REPORT PART I

REF: SECSTATE 249035

Summary

1. The transshipment of cocaine through Honduras by air, land, and maritime routes continued in 2004. While seizures were slightly down in 2004 compared to last year's record levels, Honduran authorities did successfully disrupt one of the most active trafficking organizations in the country, dealing a significant setback to organized crime in the region. Corruption within the police, Public Ministry (PM), and the judiciary, however, continues to hamper law enforcement efforts.

2. Limited resources remain the largest obstacle to Honduras' ability to implement its national counternarcotics policy, yet the Government of Honduras (GOH) remains committed to stemming the flow of illegal narcotics transiting its territory. Both the police and military take an active part in Honduras' counternarcotics strategy, with the Honduran Navy responding particularly well given its limited resources. While many arrests are made, the PM has had little success in prosecuting these individuals. Drug abuse in Honduras appears to be on the rise, with availability and usage up in 2004. Honduras is a party to the 1988 UN Drug Convention.

STATUS OF COUNTRY

3. Due to Honduras' geographic location and the GOH's limited interdiction resources, the transshipment of drugs, primarily cocaine, through Honduras continues at a persistent rate. Transshipment is facilitated by direct air and maritime links to U.S. cities and the Pan-American Highway, which crosses southern Honduras. While the police and military lack sufficient assets to comprehensively attack drug trafficking in Honduras, there were nonetheless significant drug seizures this year. Honduras is not a significant producer of drugs or precursor chemicals.

COUNTRY ACTIONS AGAINST DRUGS IN 2004

4. Policy Initiatives: The GOH continued a joint police and military counternarcotics initiative launched in April 2003 to discourage traffickers from using Honduras as a transit point. This initiative includes the use of the Honduran Air Force to interdict illicit flights entering Honduran airspace. A Honduran Frontier Police presence at Honduras' Pan-American Highway checkpoint also provides a deterrent to the flow of narcotics into Honduras from its southern border with Nicaragua.

5. A new draft counternarcotics law under review in the National Congress would significantly expand the authority of law enforcement agencies to initiate undercover operations. Current law prohibits law enforcement agencies from using these types of operations to conduct investigations, mandating in fact, that anyone participating in the purchase and/or sale of narcotics, including police participating in sting operations, be arrested.

6. Honduras is also in the process of considering revisions to its Criminal Procedures Code that took effect on February 20, 2002. Proposed revisions include increased penalties for crimes related to drug trafficking and/or possession.

7. Accomplishments: As of December 1, 2004, Honduran authorities have seized 3,866 kilograms of cocaine, 1,611 pounds of marijuana, one kilogram of heroin, and destroyed approximately 71,152 marijuana plants during the year. The GOH seized USD 2,058,803 in cash (setting a new national record) plus numerous other assets, including property, aircraft, go-fast boats, and vehicles worth well over USD 2,000,000. Honduran authorities also made 751 narcotics-related arrests.

8. The Honduran Frontier Police have been largely responsible for these successes, drawing on intensive

counternarcotics training, and U.S. technical assistance and equipment. In 2004, cooperation among all elements of the police, military, and other special investigative units increased. The Honduran Navy participated in a number of regional counternarcotics efforts that led to large seizures in international waters.

¶9. On July 14, Pedro Garcia Montes was killed in Cartagena, Colombia. Montes, a Honduran citizen, was considered to be the head of a major trafficking organization in Honduras. Upon Montes' death, police raided numerous properties belonging to him, resulting in seizures of weapons, cash, and other contraband. They also arrested Ethalson Mejia Hoy, a key Montes associate. Montes' death effectively decapitated his organization and was a significant blow to organized crime in the region.

¶10. Law Enforcement Efforts: Counternarcotics law enforcement is a priority for the Maduro Government, although limited resources, corruption, and inexperienced personnel hinder GOH efforts to stop traffickers using Honduras as a transit country. Police, constrained by lack of adequate transportation, rarely patrol some areas of the country, particularly in the isolated northeast. Despite these constraints, Honduran law enforcement agencies made many drug-related arrests. The Honduran judicial system, however, has a poor track record of turning these arrests into convictions.

¶11. Corruption: Endemic corruption continues to impede effective counternarcotics law enforcement in Honduras. Corruption within the judicial system particularly has been problematic (a judge released Mejia on bail after police had arrested him on a valid INTERPOL notice). In 2004, Honduras amended its constitution to strip immunity from prosecution from high-level government officials. To date, the National Congress has not passed implementing legislation that many GOH officials believe is necessary, and there have been no prosecutions of formerly immune individuals. Honduras is a signatory to the Inter-American Convention Against Corruption, but has fallen short of fully implementing the Convention's recommendations.

¶12. Agreements and Treaties: Honduras has counternarcotics agreements with the United States, Belize, Colombia, Jamaica, Mexico, Venezuela, and Spain and is a party to the 1988 UN Drug Convention. Honduras recently certified its major public maritime ports in compliance with International Ship and Port Facility Security codes and is an active member of the Inter-American Drug Abuse Control Commission (CICAD). In 2004, Honduras signed the UN Convention Against Corruption, but it has yet to be approved by the National Congress. A U.S.-Honduras maritime counternarcotics agreement entered into force in 2001 and a bilateral extradition exists between the U.S. and Honduras. Honduras is one of ten nations to sign the Caribbean Maritime Counterdrug Agreement, but has not yet ratified it.

¶13. Cultivation/Production: Cannabis is the only illegal drug known to be cultivated in Honduras. The GOH does not permit the use of aerial eradication; however upon detection, marijuana plants are cut down and destroyed.

¶14. Drug Flow/Transit: In 2004, there was a noticeable increase in the number of detected suspect maritime vessels transiting through Honduran territorial waters en route to southern Mexico and the United States. Suspect air-tracks, however, decreased. Cocaine and heroin are smuggled overland by commercial and private vehicles. Approximately 90 percent of all drugs transiting Honduras are destined for the United States. There is evidence of the existence of an illicit trade in "arms for drugs," with arms from these deals presumably destined for use by terrorist groups in Colombia.

¶15. Domestic Programs/Demand Reduction: Drug abuse in Honduras appears to be on the rise and illegal drugs are becoming increasingly available, particularly along the Caribbean coast. The Maduro Administration launched a pilot program directed at Honduran youth to fight drug abuse and the National Anti-Narcotics Council is making demand reduction a major part of Honduran counternarcotics efforts. This effort reflects the government's appreciation that drug trafficking through Honduras is not only a national security threat, but a major public policy problem as well.

----- U.S. POLICY INITIATIVES AND PROGRAMS -----

¶16. U.S. counternarcotics assistance to Honduras is intended to augment GOH efforts to strengthen the rule of law, increase police, judicial, and investigative efficiency, reduce corruption, and build strong counternarcotics institutions. In 2004, assistance was primarily directed to the Frontier Police, Ministry of Public Security, and the Public Ministry, although the U.S. also provided limited funds to assist Honduras in demand reduction efforts. The GOH has made a firm commitment to combat drug trafficking and the U.S. will continue to assist Honduras in its fight to reduce narcotics trafficking in the region and associated corruption.

#Palmer